

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 INR-07 L-03 ACDA-12
NSAE-00 PA-01 SS-15 PRS-01 SP-02 USIA-06 TRSE-00
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R 171651Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7876
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
COMICEDEFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L REYKJAVIK 1647

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IC
SUBJECT: SOCIAL DEMOCRATS EMERGE STRONGER FROM REYKJAVIK PRIMARY

REF: REYKJAVIK 1590

1. SUMMARY: RESULT OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRIMARY IN REYKJAVIK WAS STRONG TICKET, HEADED BY PARTY CHAIRMAN BENEDIKT GRONDAL, THAT SHOULD BE BOOST TO PARTY'S HOPES FOR GAINS IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS NEXT SPRING. WOUNDS WILL HAVE TO HEAL AND PROBLEMS STILL REMAIN BUT PARTY APPEARS TO BE HEADING IN RIGHT DIRECTION. IMPROVED PROSPECTS FOR SURVIVAL OF PRO-NATO BASE SDP AS PARLIAMENTARY PARTY ARE SIGNIFICANT FOR BOTH INDEPENDENCE PARTY AND USG INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

2. SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY FOR ALTHING LIST IN REYKJAVIK NOVEMBER 12-13 WIDELY VIEWED AS VICTORY FOR NEW FACES AND AS SIGN OF REVITALIZATION OF PARTY. PARTY CHAIRMAN BENEDIKT GRONDAL, BOOSTED BY HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH YOUNG CHALLENGER VILMUNDUR GYLFASON, WON BID FOR FIRST PLACE. ATTEMPT BY INCUMBENT MP EGGERT THORSTEINSSON
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TO DEPOST GRONDAL FAILED AND THORSTEINSSON WILL INVOLUNTARILY RETIRE AT END OF ALTHING SESSION SINCE HE WAS ALSO DEFEATED BY GYLFASON FOR SECOND SPOT ON THE LIST. ANOTHER NEW FACE IN NATIONAL POLITICS, JOHANNA SIGURDARDOTTIR, A WOMAN WITH GOOD CONNECTIONS WITHIN LABOR MOVEMENT, OVERWHELMINGLY CAPTURED THIRD PLACE.

3. RESULTS OF PRIMARY WERE DETERMINED CHIEFLY BY SDP MEMBERS BECAUSE OF SURPRISINGLY LOW CROSSOVER VOTE BY MEMBERS OTHER PARTIES (REFTEL). LOW CROSSOVER WORKED TO DISADVANTAGE THORSTEINSSON WHO NEEDED OUTSIDE CROSSOVER VOTES (PARTICULARLY FROM THE INDEPENDENCE PARTY) TO WIN AND PLASTERED NEWSPAPERS WITH HIS LAST MINUTE APPEAL FOR SUPPORT. REASONS GIVEN FOR LOW RATE OF CROSSOVER ARE: BAD WEATHER; PROXIMITY OF IP PRIMARY (NOVEMBER 19-21) MAKING IT AWKWARD FOR SAME VOTERS TO SHOW UP TWO STRAIGHT WEEKS AT POLLING PLACE; ADVERSE PUBLICITY THAT CROSSOVERS RECEIVED JUST BEFORE PRIMARY BECAUSE OF THEIR IMPACT IN OTHER CONSTITUENCIES; AND QUESTION OF WHETHER IT WAS WORTH THE TROUBLE. ALL THESE FACTORS COMBINED TO GIVE GRONDAL SURPRISINGLY COMFORTABLE MARGIN.

4. GRONDAL'S VICTORY PROBABLY STEMMED FROM HIS POSITION AS SDP CHAIRMAN. PRO-GRONDAL TELEPHONE CAMPAIGN TO SDP VOTERS ASKED IF THEY THEMSELVES WANTED TO BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR DEFEAT OF PARTY CHAIRMAN. THIS TACTIC REPORTEDLY PROVED TO BE PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE WITH OLDER VOTERS SEEKING TO PRESERVE PARTY AT ALL COSTS. ON OTHER END OF AGE SCALE, GYLFASSON'S YOUNG SUPPORTERS WERE EXHORTED TO VOTE A GRONDAL-GYLFASSON SLATE.

5. BIG WINNER WAS GYLFASSON, 29 YEAR OLD SON OF SDP
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ALTHING FACTION LEADER GYLFI GISLASSON, WHO WAS ENDORSED BY SEVEN OUT OF EVERY TEN VOTERS FOR EITHER FIRST OR SECOND PLACE ON TICKET. GYLFASSON, FRENETIC JOURNALIST WHO SEES HIMSELF AS ICELAND'S ANSWER TO WOODWARD AND BERSTEIN, HAS ENJOYED AMBIVALENT REPUTATION FOR ASKING THE POINTED QUESTIONS NO ONE ELSE WOULD. CAMPAIGNING WITH AN "ORGANIZATION" AND ON PLATFORM OF ACTION AND QTE REFORM UNQTE, GYLFASSON HAD THORSTEINSSON'S NAME ON TOP OF LIST OF "RASCALS" HE WANTED TO THROW OUT.

6. THORSTEINSSON, MP FOR ALMOST TWENTY YEARS AND FORMER CABINET MEMBER, WILL NEED TO FIND EMPLOYMENT ELSEWHERE NEXT YEAR AT AGE 53 AND IS SOMEWHAT BITTER. VICTORIOUS WING OF PARTY, PERHAPS SOMEWHAT OPTIMISTICALLY, BELIEVES TIME BETWEEN NOW AND SPRING ELECTIONS WILL HEAL ALL WOUNDS. PROBLEM, ACCORDING TO SDP VICE CHAIRMAN, IS THAT ICELANDERS, WITHOUT LONG HISTORY OF PRIMARIES, DO NOT KNOW HOW TO BE GOOD LOSERS.

7. IMPORTANCE OF THIS PRIMARY IN ICELANDIC POLITICAL LIFE UNDERScoreD BY HEAVY COVERAGE OF CAMPAIGN AN OF

RESULTS IN ALL MEDIA REGARDLESS OF PARTY AFFILIATION.
MANY IN IP, PARTY THAT HAS MOST TO GAIN FROM STRONG
SDP, BELIVE THAT DESPITE ANY RESERVATIONS THEY
HAVE ABOUT GRONDAL'S LEADERSHIP, SOCIAL DEMOCRATS
HAVE PUT TOGETHER IMPRESSIVE LIST THAT COMBINES EX-
PERIENCE WITH YOUTHFUL AND POPULAR PERSONALITIES
WHICH CAN ATTRACT FEMALE AND LABOR SUPPORT ACROSS THE
BOARD. SDP APPEARS TO BE MOVING ON RIGHT TRACT,
WHICH IS ENCOURAGING IN TERMS OF IP (AND USG) INTERESTS
(AS NOTED IN PARA 7 REFTEL.)
BLAKE

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Message Attributes

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